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Department of State

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FOR THE SECRETARY AND THE PRESIDENT FROM AMBASSADOR HABIB

E.O. 12065: RDS 1,3,4 6/8/82 (LEWIS, SAMUEL W.) OR-M
TAGS: MILI, IS, LE, IS, US, SY, PLO, MOPS
SUBJECT: LEBANON HOSTILITIES: ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION AT COB JUNE 8

REF: JERUSALEM 1744

1. (S) ENTIRE TEXT.

2. EVENTS ARE MOVING SO RAPIDLY IN LEBANON THAT I DO NOT FEEL CONFIDENT I HAVE A CLEAR PICTURE OF ULTIMATE ISRAELI INTENTIONS. ONE THING IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE OVERRIDING IMMEDIATE ISSUE IS TO TRY TO AVOID A MAJOR ISRAELI-SYRIAN EXPLOSION. I THEREFORE AM CONCENTRATING ON THAT PROBLEM, WHILE BEGINNING TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN EARLY CEASE-FIRE AND NEGOTIATIONS UNDER WHICH AN ULTIMATE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL CAN TAKE PLACE IN A LATER BUT NOT PROTRACTED PHASE.

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State Dept. review completed

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3. LATEST FRAGMENTARY REPORTS OF ISRAELI MILITARY MOVES CLOSE TO BEIRUT, JUST SOUTH OF THE BEIRUT-DAMASCUS HIGHWAY, AND EVEN ALLEGEDLY AT JUNEIH NORTH OF BEIRUT RAISE SUSPICIONS OF AN ISRAELI-PHALANGE DECISION TO LINK UP THEIR FORCES AND REDRAW THE POLITICAL MAP OF LEBANON ONCE AND FOR ALL. THIS IS NOT, REPEAT, NOT, THE ISRAELI OBJECTIVE AS BEGIN REAFFIRMED IT AGAIN TONIGHT TO ME, NAMELY CREATING A 40 KILOMETER BUFFER ZONE TO PROTECT PERMANENTLY ISRAEL'S NORTHERN BORDER TOWNS. NONETHELESS, WE NEED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT SHARON'S MORE GRANDIOSE SCHEME OF PUTTING ISRAELI FORCES ALONGSIDE OF BASHIR'S EAST OF BEIRUT TO FORCE SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM THE BEIRUT AREA. WE ALSO NOTE KIMCHE'S "PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE" FOR LONG-RANGE ARRANGEMENTS IN LEBANON, AS STATED TO THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR, I.E. "A THOROUGH-GOING CHANGE IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON...." IT COULD WELL BE THAT THE RAPIDITY AND RELATIVE EASE OF THE ISRAELI ADVANCE HAS INCREASED THEIR APPETITE, AS GENERAL CALLAHAN REPORTEDLY REMARKED TODAY AFTER A MEETING WITH EITAN.

4. BEGIN ADMITTED TO ME UNDER CAREFUL PROBING THAT CHIEF OF STAFF EITAN MET WITH BASHIR GEMAYEL, APPARENTLY LAST NIGHT JUNE 7. BEGIN TOLD ME IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE THAT BASHIR HAD PASSED ON, VIA EITAN, WORD FROM PRESIDENT SARKIS THAT SARKIS IS PREPARED TO OPEN NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL FOR PEACE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND LEBANON. (BEGIN STRESSED THE EXTREME SECRECY OF THIS INFORMATION AND HIS PROMISE OF COMPLETE CONFIDENTIALITY TO BASHIR). I ASKED HIM TO GIVE ME THE PRECISE TEXT OF THE SARKIS MESSAGE SINCE I WAS SKEPTICAL OF ITS VALIDITY. THE REPORTS THIS EVENING HOWEVER, OF ISRAELI OPERATIONS IN THE BEIRUT AREA NOW MAKE ME MORE INCLINED TO BELIEVE

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THAT BASHIR AND EITAN MAY HAVE REACHED SOME KIND OF UNDERSTANDING LAST NIGHT AND THAT SARKIS MAY INDEED BE PREPARING FOR A WHOLE NEW POLITICAL CONSTELLATION IN THE WAKE OF THE ISRAELI SUCCESSES.

5. ALL OF THIS MAKES THE ACCUMULATING EVIDENCE OF SYRIAN-ISRAELI CLASHES MORE DANGEROUS. WHEN BEGIN ASKED ME TO TRANSMIT HIS MESSAGE TO ASSAD, I AGREED IMMEDIATELY TO DO SO, THINKING INTRA ALIA THAT THE PROCESS OF MY SEEKING AN ANSWER FROM ASSAD MIGHT IN ITSELF INHIBIT AN ISRAELI DECISION TO ESCALATE AGAINST THE SYRIAN FORCES. IN ANY CASE, THE FIRST STAGE OF ANY PROCESS WILL HAVE TO BE ACHIEVING A CEASE FIRE IN PLACE AND A POSITIVE RESPONSE FROM ASSAD TO BEGIN'S APPEAL COULD SET THAT IN MOTION.

6. DURING MY MEETING WITH BEGIN TONIGHT I WAS ALSO SEEKING OTHER WAYS TO TRY TO GET THE ISRAELIS TO LIMIT ASPECTS OF THEIR MILITARY OPERATIONS WHICH ARE ESPECIALLY DAMAGING TO OUR FUTURE ABILITY TO ACHIEVE A CEASEFIRE. IT WAS FOR THIS REASON THAT I PRESSED THEM TO ABANDON ANY FUTURE BOMBING OF BEIRUT AND WAS PARTICULARLY SURPRISED WHEN SHARON APPARENTLY AGREED WITH BEGIN TO CONSIDER MY REQUEST SYMPATHETICALLY AND FAVORABLY. I ALSO PRESSED FOR AN EXPLANATION OF THE SHELLING OF DAMOUR, A TOWN CONSIDERABLY NORTH OF THE 40 KILOMETER STATED OBJECTIVE. FOR WHAT IT WAS WORTH, BEGIN AND SHAMIR TOLD ME THAT THIS ACTION WAS MERELY "TACTICAL" AND IT WAS NOT INTENDED TO INCLUDE DAMOUR IN THE "BUFFER PERIMETER". THE STRONG IMPLICATION WAS THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD WITHDRAW FROM DAMOUR WHEN HOSTILITIES CEASED THOUGH THIS WAS NOT STATED AS ANY FIRM COMMITMENT.

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